

SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALES *EUBALAENA AUSTRALIS* (DESMOULINS, 1822) IN MORETON BAY, QUEENSLAND. *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 45(2): 576. 2000:- Southern right whales, *Eubalaena australis*, occur primarily between latitudes 30°S and 60°S, with annual winter migrations from higher latitude summer feeding grounds to lower latitude breeding areas (Best et al. 1993). In Australian waters, the Great Australian Bight is a major calving area (Burnell & Bryden 1997). However, sightings occur further north along the east and west coasts (Bannister 1986). The most northerly was at Flinders Reef (26°59'S, 153°29'E) in August 1998. This and other sightings in 1998 were the first published record of *E. australis* in Queensland waters (Noad 2000).

This note records 1999 sightings of *E. australis* in Moreton Bay. At 15:10 on 2 August 1999, two *E. australis* were seen at 27°17'S, 153°18'E, between Mud Island and Shark Spit on Moreton Island (Fig. 1A). Observations were made from a vessel conducting dolphin research. The pair was observed for 45 minutes, while travelling slowly south. The larger and darker whale breached 5-6 times (Fig. 1B,C). The other was smaller and distinctly brown with dark mottles (Fig. 1D). It did not breach.

Other sightings of *E. australis* in Moreton Bay preceded this record. On 22 July two were observed breaching and travelling north out of Moreton Bay from Tangalooma jetty and on 30 July two were sighted travelling south into the Bay (27°10'S, 153°20'E) (S.J. Allen pers. comm.). On 27 July a whale-watch vessel encountered a single *E. australis* near Bribie I. (27°03'S, 153°14'E; K. McTaggart pers. comm.).

E. australis populations are currently increasing after near extirpation over the past 200 years (Bannister 1986, Tormosov et al. 1998). The full extent of their pre-whaling range is unknown. Best (1993) suggested that when mysticete populations are reduced, their ranges contract and conversely, as they recover, their ranges may expand. Peripheral areas such as southern Queensland waters, which may have been frequented previously, appear to be re-inhabited seasonally. Noad

(2000) suggested that visits to Queensland waters may become more common as recovery occurs. These records and the 1998 sightings, demonstrating the occurrence of *E. australis* in SE Queensland waters in consecutive years, supports Noad's prediction.

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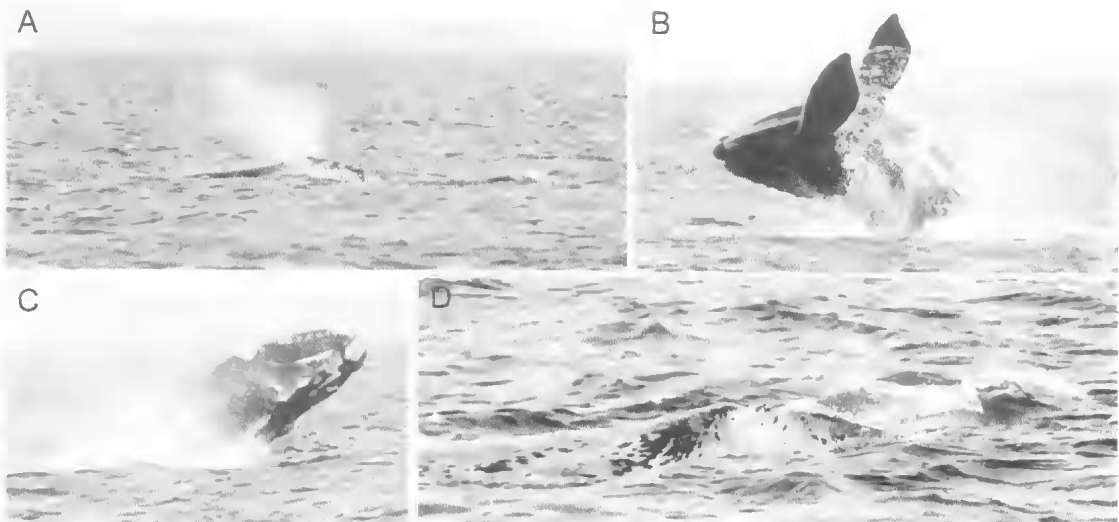


FIG. 1. A, two *Eubalaena australis* in Moreton Bay (2 August 1999); B, C, breaching demonstrates characteristic pectoral fins and rostral callosities; D, dorsum of lighter, brown animal with mottled pattern.